

Vol 2 6-1

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PRACTICAL INFORMATION

ON

ST. ANTHONY'S FIRE,

OR

ERYSIPELAS;

AND ON

ERYTHEMATOUS AFFECTIONS IN GENERAL;

AS ALSO ON

THE MEASLES:

IN WHICH

NEW MODES OF TREATMENT

ARE COMMUNICATED.

By E. PEART, M. D.

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TO THE
MEDICAL SOCIETY OF LONDON,

As a grateful acknowledgment of the honour conferred, when, unsoliciting and personally unknown, he was elected a Corresponding Member, this small Tract is most respectfully dedicated by

THE AUTHOR.

Butterwick, near Gainsborough,
July 22, 1802.

MEMORIAL ADDRESS

Delivered at the Anniversary of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, held at Bath, 1841, by the Rev. John Lubbock, M.A., Secretary of the Association.

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P R E F A C E.

HAVING mentioned, in my second Communication, my intention of laying before the Faculty the new method of treating Erysipelatous Affections, which I have found so singularly efficacious in my own practice, I now sit down to fulfil my promise.

Having insinuated, in the tract alluded to, that the mode of treatment I am now going to make public appears to me to be specific in these disorders, I think it not improper to repeat what I then advanced; but at the same time to remind my reader, that although its effects have been so constantly and powerfully efficacious in every case in which I have administered it, as to make me esteem it *specific* in *erysipelatous disorders*, yet I by no means assert *that it is so*: that

must be decided by still more extensive, or more general experience. But as I have adopted it, and tried it in a variety of cases, from the slightest affection to the most formidable and alarming degree of the disease, and have never been disappointed in my expectations of its wished-for effects, it is with some degree of confidence that I come forward to recommend it to attention.

With respect to the Measles, that common scourge of infancy, my assurance is less, though my expectations are equal. Since I have formed my idea of the nature of the disorder, I have not had sufficient experience to enable me to speak with that degree of confidence which extensive practice only can give; and I introduce the subject from a wish that those gentlemen who have extensive opportunities, which a retired country village cannot offer, would cautiously try the remedy proposed, and then adopt or relinquish it as its real effects shall shew it to deserve.

Should any gentleman, from the laudable desire to neglect no plausible means of improving

ing the practice of medicine, and of alleviating the afflictions to which human nature is liable, make trial of this new remedy for the measles, which I recommend from its striking effects in the few cases in which it has been tried, I shall think myself obliged by his communicating the result. Indeed it would give me pleasure to hear that any of the peculiar modes of treatment which I already have laid down, or may propose, are found to be efficacious; as such communications would not only prove that what have appeared to be valuable improvements in my own practice, are found to be equally so in the hands of others, but also that they are not by all thought unworthy of attention; an attention, indeed, which the importance of the subjects, and the motive which brings them before the public, must and ought to excite in every liberal-minded practitioner; who, conscious of the weighty charge committed to his care, feels it an indispensable duty to neglect no means whatsoever, which may even possibly be conducive to the ease, the safety, and happiness of his patients.

PRACTICAL INFORMATION,

&c.

*A few general Remarks on Erysipelas, and on
Erythematous Affections in general.*

I AM not going to give a formal description of these two disorders—that would be unnecessary; since I am addressing myself to those who are supposed to be well acquainted with them. Indeed were that not the case, I should feel very little inclination to enter upon a description of what has already been described myriads of times, without adding one iota of information, either with respect to the disorder itself, or its mode of cure.

Erythema appears to me to be merely a milder degree of erysipelas, and as it has always readily yielded to the same remedy, I shall consider it as such.

Erythema, however, is frequently excited by local stimulus, and in some cases by certain stimuli taken into the stomach, which, when received into the blood, act as stimulants upon the skin, and induce erythema, as I have occasionally witnessed numbers of times. I know one gentleman in particular, who by taking a few grains of the resin of guaiacum, is certain to have an erythematous affection of the hands or eyes in the course of a few hours. Such affections are but slight in general, and not preceded by fever; on the contrary, erysipelas is commonly ushered in by a considerable degree of fever, and in severe cases with much fever and delirium. Erythema, when very considerable, or when improperly treated, may, however, soon become attended with fever sufficient to give it all the dangerous importance of erysipelas.

As

As sometimes great danger may arise from mistaking erysipelas for inflammation of a very different nature, particularly when it fixes on the legs or arms, I shall take the liberty of making a remark or two which may be worth considering before the judgment is fixed.

It is commonly observed, that in erysipelatous inflammation, if the finger be pressed upon the part, and then suddenly removed, the compressed part appears white, but instantly resumes the general redness. I have, however, met with severe cases where the disorder has been extensive, the colour deep red, and the part greatly swelled, in which no pressure that I have thought prudent to make, or my patient has been willing to suffer, has produced any thing like whiteness, or any very sensible alteration in the colour of the part the finger was pressed upon. Another remark which I wish to make is, that in such very severe attacks the lymphatics and the glands they pass into generally become *extremely* painful; and their course from the seat of the complaint to the gland they enter into, may be readily

traced by the evident degree of inflammation that is perceptible on the skin which covers them ; and this I have observed more particularly and strikingly evident in such cases of erysipelas than on any other occasions.

I shall not, however, take up more of my reader's time on this head, but shall immediately proceed to point out the mode of treatment which I have adopted, and which I hope will be found not altogether undeserving of his attention.

On the Mode of Treatment in Erysipelas and in Erythematous Affections.

SOME time ago I was consulted by a gentleman who was frequently subject to what he called St. Anthony's fire. One or both eyes were generally affected, and the eyelids so much swelled as frequently to close them completely.

The

The skin was red ; a number of minute vesicles distended with ichor soon became perceptible : that ichor was discharged with great itching, and desquamation and recovery succeeded.

The heat, redness, and itching at some times were almost insupportable.

This complaint, however, was not always confined to the face or eyes ; sometimes the hands, feet, and particularly the genitals, were subject to its attacks.

When the disease was more severe than usual, the inflammation was very considerable, attended with pain and tenderness, and generally productive of some degree of feverishness and restlessness, which continued till the minute vesications appeared, when the pain was converted into itching, and exudation and desquamation terminated the disease.

At the time he consulted me he had a smart attack of the disorder, which had completely
closed

closed one eye ; the face on the same side was greatly swelled, red, and rather painful, particularly on pressure : with these symptoms he had a slight degree of fever, and great lassitude.

I commenced my attack upon the disorder in the usual modes of practice. In a day or two the right hand was affected : I made some change in the medicines. In a few days more the genitals and one thigh were also added to the list. The eyes, face, hand, thigh, &c. were now greatly swelled, inflamed, and pouring out ichor, with extreme itching from myriads of little vesicles ; and in this manner the disease continued for many days, as though it were to set me and my medicines at defiance ; for not one article likely to succeed was neglected, internally or externally, and I had plenty of time to change my mode of operation. At length, however, the disorder abated, and my patient recovered : he was satisfied, and so was I. He was satisfied that I had paid every attention ; had treated his complaint with profound judgment ; and that it was the nature of the disorder not to admit of a
more

more speedy removal in so smart an attack ; and I was satisfied that every thing I had done for him had not been of one farthing's worth of advantage *to him*, neither had any one article shewn the least power over the disease.

Soon after this I was consulted on a violent erysipelas, ushered in by a cold fit and fever, which had fixed upon the leg of a gentleman never before subject to this disease ; one who had lived freely : aged about fifty.

The leg was of a dark red, much swelled and painful : he had fever and great restlessness. On the second day of the inflammation, vesications were formed with that appearance which indicates a tendency to sphacelation.

A long tedious attention, various changes of medicine, opium, camphor, the bark, &c. &c. at length *enabled the constitution to overcome the disease* ; for most certainly none of those articles acted in any other manner.

This mode of proceeding by no means satisfied me. I had long been persuaded that every disorder has a specific remedy, if we only knew it, and consequently erysipelas amongst the rest.

Soon after this, in consequence of venturing to deviate from the common rules, I formed a different idea of the nature of erysipelas and erythematous affections in general; and laid down a mode of treatment in consequence, which I was determined to pursue the first fair opportunity which occurred.

According to my own mode of reasoning, erysipelas must be the effect of a cause similar to that which produces the scarlatina maligna, only in a milder degree in general; and erythema still more so.

The volatile alkali, or carbonate of ammonia, therefore, was what I proposed chiefly to depend upon.

A case

A case of St. Anthony's fire soon occurred. The face greatly swelled and inflamed, with an intolerable heat, and a sensation between pain and itching: this suddenly came on in the morning; I saw the patient in the evening, as the swelling rapidly increased. I instantly gave *six grains* of *volatile alkali* in a little water, ordering it to be repeated every two or three hours; and called again in the morning, when, to my astonishment, the face was nearly settled to its usual appearance, and the disorder almost vanished!—A little of the solution considerably diluted was also used externally.

Great as were my expectations from the remedy, I did not expect so sudden an amendment, and therefore was not by any means assured that the disappearance of the complaint was entirely in consequence of the patient having taken the volatile alkali.

Several similar cases of erythema, or of slighter degrees of erysipelas, soon offered, and put me out of doubt, as they readily gave way to the

remedy. In flighter cases, in a very few hours, the symptoms were alleviated; and the amendment speedily terminated in health.

A more serious case, however, soon presented itself, to prove the full powers of my new remedy.

A gentleman, after being slightly indisposed a day or two, was seized in the evening with a shaking fit, succeeded by fever, great restlessness, and some delirium. The next morning the right leg was very painful, greatly swelled, and most highly inflamed. The inflammation was of a dark or very deep red colour, and extended over the foot and up to the knee.

The lymphatics were greatly inflamed up to the groin; and so painful as scarcely to bear the slightest pressure, without misery, in any part of their whole course; and the glands in the groin were equally swelled and painful.

A medical

A medical gentleman had been immediately called in, who had recourse to the usual modes of treatment—salines, purgatives, opiates, diaphoretics, antimonials, &c. with various external applications of the cooling kind.

The patient had been three days under this mode of treatment when I was consulted. He had been taking mercury, with febrifuges, till the bowels were considerably purged; and opium was then given to moderate that effect. I found him with considerable fever, the pulse one hundred, great thirst, and great debility. The inflammation, pain, and swelling, were now rapidly increasing. Several large blisters had appeared during the last twelve hours, and were surrounded by a livid but deep red. Some purging still continued.

I ordered an opiate to be given, as often as it was found necessary, to moderate the purging, or to remove great anxiety, pain, or restlessness.

I immediately prescribed one drachm of volatile alkali, to be formed into twenty pills, by means of the aromatic confection; of which three were given immediately, and two were to be taken every two, three, or four hours.

At the same time I ordered twelve grains of volatile alkali, and twelve grains of sugar of lead, or acetite of lead, to be dissolved in four ounces of water, to which was added one drachm of the spirit of ammonia. With this the inflamed leg was bathed, and a thin fine piece of linen was put upon it, with orders to wet that covering frequently with the solution, without removing it: the precipitated lead, deposited on the inflamed surface by the lotion, was ordered not to be washed off, but suffered to remain.

Upon the broken blisters plasters were put, of a falve, composed of the common ointment of yellow resin, with a little white lead and common chalk.

In a few hours my patient was sensibly relieved: the next day he walked across the floor: the following day he went into his garden; and, in a few days more, was completely well; excepting that debility, which so long and so violent a disorder had necessarily induced; and which, by continuing the volatile alkali two or three times a day, with a little tincture of bark, was very soon removed.

It is astonishing how rapidly the inflammation, pain, swelling, and fever abated, almost immediately after the volatile alkali was given; and, although the vesications were broken into large black sores, and threatened to become troublesome ulcers, yet, in a few days, they were completely healed, without any other application than the lotion and the ointment at first ordered.

I shall but slightly mention one case more, which was a violent erysipelas of the face: the eyes were swelled up, and covered with large vesications, which very soon formed ulcers; with evident marks of sphacelation commencing,
when

when I saw the patient. He had fever, delirium, pain, great restlessness, and anxiety, and a frequent sensation of faintness, with great debility and prostration of strength. He had had purgatives, salines, camphor, the bark, &c. with fomentations and embrocations of different kinds. The disorder, however, was rapidly gaining ground, and black sloughs appeared upon the surfaces, exposed by the broken vesicles.

I treated the case much as the former, with the lotion, with the volatile alkali, and with tincture of opium and the volatile aromatic spirit or spirit of ammonia, as often as pain or restlessness made them necessary.

The patient soon found great relief; and, by persisting in the volatile alkali, in the ammoniacal spirit with the tincture of bark, and in the opiate, occasionally; with the external applications, as in the former case; in a day or two the fever, swelling, and inflammation were nearly gone, and he soon recovered his perfect health.

Many

Many cases of greater or less importance have, since then, occurred; in all of which the volatile alkali has been my chief resource, and in no one case has it failed me.

In these disorders, as well as in the scarlet fever, whether common or malignant, I generally give about six grains at a dose, either in a state of solution or made into pills; ordering that dose to be repeated every two, four, six, or eight hours, as the degree of disorder or the urgency of symptoms may seem to require.

It must naturally be supposed, however, that in some cases, some patients, and some constitutions, that dose may be increased or diminished with advantage.

In these disorders too, as well as in scarlatina, I depend chiefly upon the volatile alkali till the disorder is in some degree subdued, before I have recourse to other medicines as auxiliaries. But erysipelas will sooner bear opium with advantage than the scarlet fever will; and, in cases attend-

ed with great faintness, the spirit of ammonia is an useful remedy, along with the simple salt, in erysipelas ; but I do not conceive it necessary in scarlatina.

In slight cases of erythema, any kind of mild alkali may answer ; but, on the volatile alkali only can I fully depend in severer attacks, and in scarlatina maligna ; and, as it succeeds equally well in milder cases also, I generally have recourse to it ; though in some particular circumstances the others are highly useful.

Thus then have I laid before my reader a faithful statement of the mode of practice which has been so singularly beneficial in the many cases of erysipelas, and of erythema, which have come under my care, since I was first led to adopt it.

It would be imprudent in me to say, positively, that the volatile alkali is a specific in these disorders ; but I certainly can say that its effects have constantly been such in my practice, as
powerfully

powerfully to incline me to think it so; and to excite me to hope it will be found so.

Be that, however, as it may, the striking success of this remedy in my own practice is at least a presumptive argument in favour of its real efficiency and power; and it is a motive sufficiently strong to induce me thus to bring it before the public, that it probably may be productive of general good: for whether it be found to possess a specific power over these disorders or not, most certainly it is a valuable remedy in cases similar to those in which I have given it; and is, therefore, an useful addition to the *methodus medendi* in similar disorders, which must render it deserving of attention.

*A few Remarks on the Measles, in which a new
Mode of Treatment is proposed.*

I NOW come forward in a more questionable shape. I have honesty enough to avow it; to put my reader upon his guard, and to excite him to caution.

The measles are a common disorder, which needs no description from me.

Every one knows that they are oftentimes a very severe affliction; sometimes dangerous; and not unfrequently leave tedious disorders in the eyes, or more alarming, and too often fatal affections of the lungs.

The common routine of practice in this disorder is merely palliative, and of so little real efficacy, that, in the country in general, the lower orders particularly trust entirely to nature and insignificant fops: it not having escaped their notice, that the sufferers, thus treated, or thus
left

left to nature alone, commonly do at least as well, and recover fully as soon, as those who are under the management of the faculty.

This being, at least in the country where I reside, the general opinion, it is very seldom indeed that I, in a retired village, have been consulted upon the disorder. Of course my practical information is not extensive.

When I had occasion to consider the nature of scarlatina and erysipelas, I was led to pay some attention to rubeola also, as a branch which, I supposed, arose from the same radix; and it was then that I wished for opportunities to refer to experience, to decide how far the supposition was correct.

The resemblance between rubeola and scarlatina is certainly considerable; both being attended with fever, followed by an eruption not very dissimilar; and in all these disorders, whether erythema, erysipelas, scarlatina, or rubeola,

after the inflammation is gone, the cuticle is thrown off in flakes or branny scales.

It is not my intention, however, here to trace resemblances, or to endeavour to enforce a mere opinion, which is not sufficiently backed by experience. I wish only to say that I conceive the measles to arise from a cause, not differing greatly in its nature from that of scarlatina and erysipelas; nor so much so as to require a mode of treatment considerably different: consequently, as I have found the mild volatile alkali to succeed in destroying or removing the morbid causes in those disorders, I am inclined to believe it will be no less efficacious in the cure of rubeola.

Some time after this opinion was formed, I was consulted respecting a little patient, who was seized by the measles. She was about three years of age, and had been ill three or four days; having been sick, and having had much fever, delirium, sneezing, and a troublesome cough.

On

On the evening before I saw her, the eruption had slightly appeared; but a feverish restless night had brought it forward so completely, that she was universally covered with it on the following morning, when I first saw her.

She at that time had much fever, her pulse very quick, her skin hot, and swelled with the eruption and general inflammation. Her nose was also considerably swelled and stuffed, or closed by the thickening of the inflamed membrane, which covers the internal surfaces; and her eyes were highly inflamed, watery, and nearly closed by the tumid state of the eyelids.

As the fever was high, the pulse quick and firm, and the eruption scarcely completed, I thought this a fair opportunity for trying the effects of the volatile alkali.

I accordingly dissolved eighteen grains of it in one ounce of water, and desired that one tea-spoonful might be given in a little cold water, with sugar, every three or four hours; and as
my

my little patient was thirsty, she had permission to drink toast and water, or a little tea, at pleasure. If the fever or any peculiar circumstances rendered it necessary, I requested that I might hear concerning her in the evening, otherwise not till the succeeding morning.

The evening passed away without interruption, and in the morning following my patient came to visit me ! She had passed a comfortable night, being cool, and having slept soundly. The inflammation of the eyes, nose, and eruption in general, were nearly gone ; and the swellings, both general and local, were so much subsided, that her countenance had in a great measure recovered its usual character. She had very little cough, no fever, and the eruption was evidently dying away. In short, she finished her medicine, and from that time suffered no further loss, either of play, or of food, or of liberty.

This great and sudden disappearance of the fever and eruption made me anxious to try the
 medicine

medicine in other cases; not only as a cure but as a preventive; being determined, on the first opportunity, to give the volatile alkali immediately on the commencement of the fever; and likewise to prescribe small doses to some who were likely to take the infection, as a prophylactic.

Another case or two occurred, much the same as that I have already described. They were treated in the same manner, with the same simple remedy, and with the same rapid disappearance of the disorder: when, unfortunately for my experience, the disease entirely disappeared.

Another case, however, soon after was laid before me, respecting a girl, about six years of age, residing several miles distant from me, and whom I did not see. She had had the measles very severely; the eruptions, at the time when I was consulted, were nearly gone, but the fever remained, with frequent delirium; cough feverishly troublesome; her eyes inflamed, and the parotids considerably enlarged and painful, with some difficulty in swallowing; and her breath
highly

highly offensive. Though this was certainly a very unfavourable specimen of the disorder, yet the volatile alkali only was given, and the patient recovered in a few days.

Although I by no means wish to repose too great confidence in the powers of the volatile alkali, in curing rubeola, because it has so completely succeeded in these few cases ; yet, as it has manifested such powerful effects, invariably, in the cases it has been administered in, I think it certainly right to lay the facts before the public, with a wish that this remedy may not be forgotten when opportunities again occur of bringing it to the only test which can decide respecting its real powers in this disorder.

HAVING thus communicated the information I at present have to give on these diseases, I shall lay down my pen.

It is my intention, however, immediately to resume it, for the purpose describing the manner of treating acute rheumatism, ophthalmia, and inflammations of that kind in general, which has been so constantly successful, as to have gained my utmost confidence; at the same time proposing a new method of treating the gout.

The severity of some of these disorders; the obstinacy of others; and the danger, or distress, which arises too frequently from their not being speedily removed, added to their extreme frequency, must render a prompt and effectual mode of treating them greatly to be wished for; and I have a pleasure in indulging the hope that the method I propose to bring before the public will be found deserving not only of attention, but of confidence.

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